Meditation and the future of society

Meditation in Catholic Tradition

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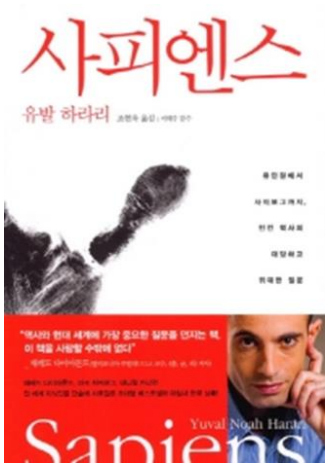
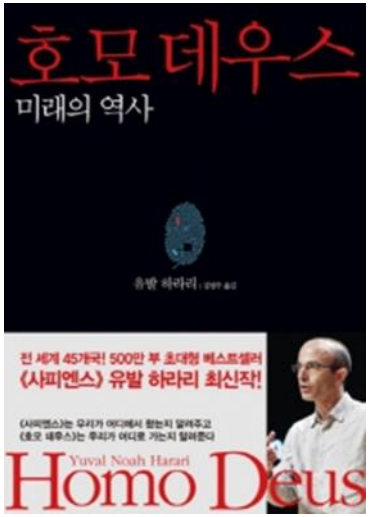
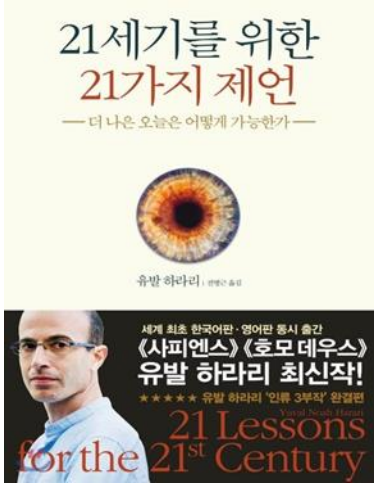
1. Critical reflection on Yuval Harari

- The author *of Sapiens, Homo Deus, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century*
- He strongly criticized institutionalized religions in his book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century.*
- He claimed that humanity no longer finds meaning or value in traditional religions, seeking a new spiritual path through meditation.







Why

does Harari believes that humanity must urgently take on meditation?

- Harari predicts in his book that all future religions will be replaced by Big Data, whose algorithms will make all the decisions.

- According to Harari, Humans in modern society live in virtual reality manipulated by Big data algorithms. They must wake up to the essentially fictional nature of the consciousness to be the masters of their own destiny, and this requires meditation to gain deep insight into their minds.

- In other words, humanity must learn how to look deeply into themselves before the Big data algorithms erode the freedom of mind, making it impossible to observe their consciousness.

Meditation is a gateway through which we can observe our own mind-stream.

The number of meditation techniques is as numerous as that of religions.

Harari attributes all the sufferings of humankind, including those of modern society, to ignorance.

To be free from suffering, we need meditation to look into our inner reality.

Harari, who learned Buddhist views through Goenka meditation, believes that all human stories from the secular point of view are ultimately fictional .

Indeed, he claims *Homo Sapiens* conquered this planet thanks above all to the unique human ability to create and spread fictions.

Furthermore, according to Harari, religious myths are the most dangerous of all the fictional stories.

All religious experiences humanity have had so far are just fiction?

The prophets in the Old Testament proclaimed the destruction of their own people who turned their backs on God's will and be complacent with false peace.

Their prophecies are not imagined fictions, but part of inner awakening earned by facing the realities of their time. It is the contemplative tradition that Jesus himself succeeded and forms an important aspect of the history of Christianity.

2. Christian meditation

1) The Jesus Prayer

Christianity, praising God's love, is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and eventually the memory of his death 2,000 years ago.

Being a Christian means following the Jesus' footsteps.

Just as Jesus achieved the union with God through prayers, Christians can live in the communion with God through prayers.

The core of Christian prayer is ruminating on Jesus' teaching (the Bible), chewing over the words from scripture into their mouth and kept chewing until one lives in a constant communion with Jesus.

"He must become greater; I must become less." (John 3:30)

The Jesus prayer

2) Desert Fathers'Prayer

After the last great persecution of Christians in the 3rd century, those who deplored the secularization of the church following the rapid expansion of Christianity forsook material goods and went to the deserts.

They ceaselessly recited mantras engaging both mind and mouth, without resorting to their analytic or imaginative faculties.

* Examples of the mantra prayer

Maranatha "Come, O Lord!"

"Hasten, O God, to save me; O Lord, come quickly to help me."(Psalm 70:1)

Desert Fathers' mantra prayers

John Cassian learned the mantra prayer from Abba Issac. Fr. John Main rediscovered and widely spread it to the world.

"They have simply to cling totally to a short verse. Keep a firm hold of this little verse, having got rid of all kinds of other thoughts."(John Cassian, *the Conferences* 10, late 4th century)

* Mantra prayer, by repeating a syllable, aspires to absolute simplicity.

*To modern people, simplicity is a challenge. But it is such simplicity that leads us to the poverty of spirit and the purity of heart.

Desert Fathers' mantra prayers

Through meditation, we come to realize

the original poverty of our spirit.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are the pure in heart,

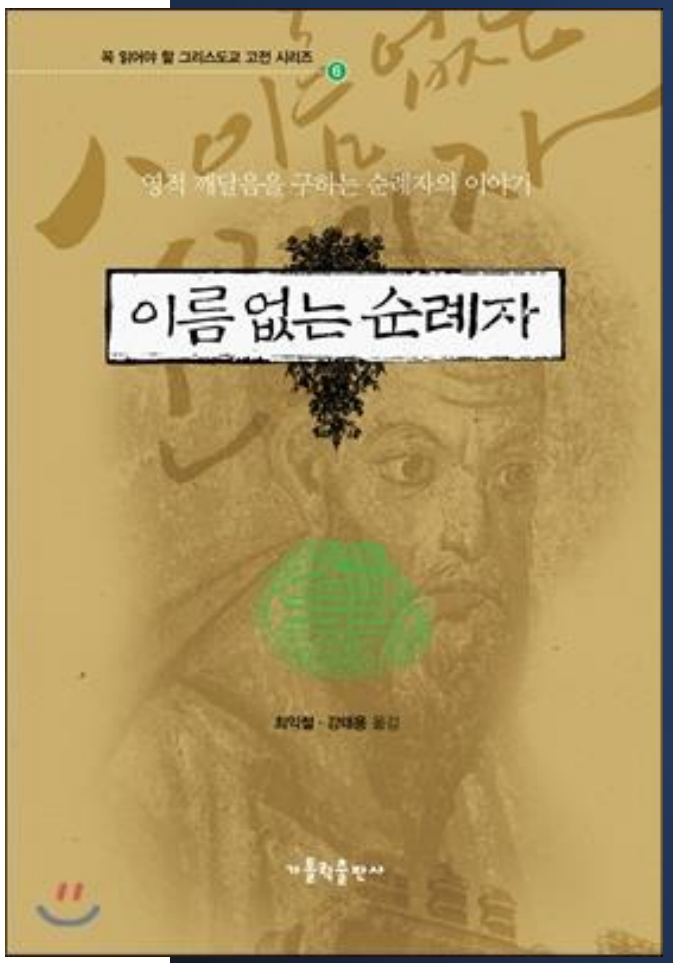
for they will see God."

3) The Jesus Prayer of the Eastern Orthodox Church

- Ancient monks recited short verses unceasingly until they were internalized and firmly rooted in the heart.

- ‘The consent of the mind transforms into the consent of the heart.

- It is unknown who created the Jesus Prayer, but similar practices have been in existence since ancient times.



The Eastern Orthodox Church's Jesus Prayer

Candid Narratives of a Pilgrim to His Spiritual Father, also called *A Way of a Pilgrim*, a 19th-century Russian classic recording a nameless pilgrim's travels, introduced the Jesus Prayer practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

- "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on us"
- "O Lord, have mercy."
- "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. "

The Jesus Prayer recited to the beat of the heart.

Lord.- Jesus.- Christ.- have.- Mercy.-on.- me.

The Eastern Orthodox Church's Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer recited to the rhythm of the breath

In-breath- Lord Jesus Christ,

Out-breath- have mercy on me.

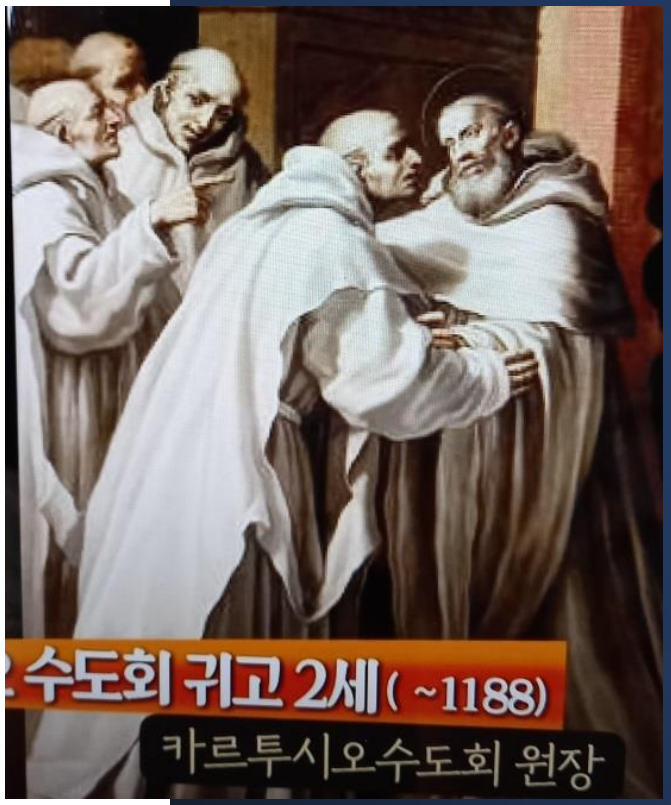
The Jesus Prayer leads the practitioner to the state of *hesychia* (ἡσυχ), meaning "stillness, rest, quiet, silence," where one ceases to register senses.

The Jesus Prayer is comparable to the chanting in Pure Land Buddhism and the recitation of the *Lotus Sutra* in Nichiren Buddhism.

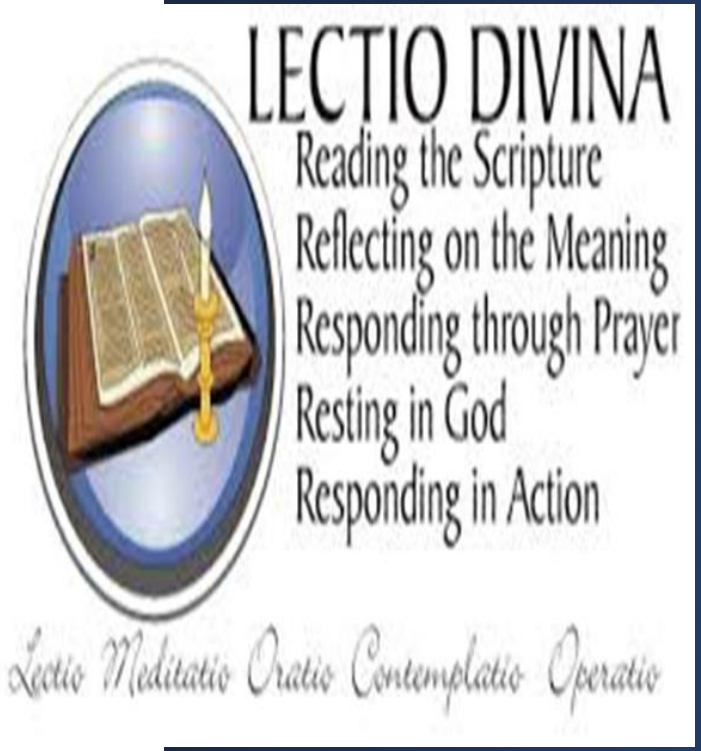
4) *Lectio Divina*

- *Lectio Divina* ("Divine Reading") is a practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer dating back to the 3rd century.

- It was formalized by the Carthusian monk Guigo II (1100~1188) during the 12th century in the early days of Scholasticism.



*4 steps: ***lectio*** **(reading),** ***meditatio*** **(reflecting),** ***oratio*** **(responding through prayer), and** ***contemplatio*** **(resting in God's presence)**



**Lectio Divina*

Letio originally means reading aloud so that the ears can listen to the words from the Bible, which will deepen your faith and cultivate meditative understanding of Jesus Christ's life and words.

"Today, if only you would hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Psalm 95)

Lectio Divina

Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”(Mark 4:9)

“Read and respond with whole of your existence. Reading the scripture doesn’t just engage eyes. It involves listening with ears and bringing it into your heart.”

- *Meditatio* (meditation) step is sometimes described as *rumination*.
- First, take one word or one text from the scripture you read into the mouth and keep repeating it. Then, savor it internally until it is assimilated, to make the word of God pass into the heart and be one with it.

Lectio Divina

Reading (*lectio*) and meditating (*meditatio*) on God's words from the scripture turns into interior savoring and then the word becomes flesh in the heart, which naturally leads to respond in prayer (*oratio*).

Oratio, in turn, deepens into *comtemplatio*, resting in God's presence.

Meditatio and *ruminatio* were used interchangeably until the late Medieval Age, when with the influences of Scholasticism logical or analytic elements are added to *meditatio*.

Lectio Divina

Oratio is a form of affective prayer that engages the "heart," the irrational and appetitive aspects of the soul, rather than the "mind", the rational or logical aspects.

Responding to the Word of God:

One rests in the presence of God by responding in willful action and performing acts of love, and this stage is called *contemplatio,* or contemplation.

Lectio Divina

Resting in God:

Remain in God's presence. Contemplating love toward God. Knowing beyond knowing. Merging with God.

The mantra prayer, the Jesus Prayer, and *Lectio Divina* are simple monastic prayer practices of ancient times, focusing on resting in the quiet stillness rather than the logical and analytic aspects of the mind.

5) Centering Prayer

- Contemplation was known to be the practice of enclosed monastic orders, rather than the prayer method for lay Christians.
- Interests in Christian contemplative traditions grew after the Second Vatican Council. Many young people turned to Eastern practices such as Buddhism or Hinduism for contemplative work.
- The Christian monastic community set out to find ways to present those practices in a more accessible and organized way. The Centering Prayer is the result of such efforts.

Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer draws on the tradition of apophatic theology.

The term 'apophatic theology' appears in *Mystical Theology* written by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

- Kataphatic (positive) theology:

Approach God or the Divine by affirmations or positive statements or images about what God is.

- Apophatic (negative) theology:

Approach God by negation, by emptying the mind of all statements or images and seeking to directly experience the Divine reality in a passive state.

"The way to know God is to surrender to the realm

(1) Origin of the Centering Prayer

The Centering Prayer movement can be traced to Abbot Thomas Keating (1923~2018), a Trappist monk of St. Joseph's Abbey in Massachusetts.

Three Trappist monks Fr. William Meninger, Fr. M. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating interacted with Buddhist monks and in 1975, they formulated a contemplation practice based on *The Cloud of Unknowing*..

Origin of the Centering Prayer

-God's presence cannot be known through a human endeavor or will. We must empty ourselves of ego and just remain in the cloud of unknowing, quietly surrendering ourselves to it.

"Pray with a short, single-syllable word, not a phrase of several words.."

"Through this word, be stripped of all thoughts."

From the *Cloud of Unknowing*

(2) Method of the Centering Prayer

- In the Centering Prayer, one stays with one’s sincere intention to be in the Lord's presence and open to His divine actions present within oneself.

① Choose a sacred word that best supports your sincere intention to be in the Lord's presence and open to His divine action within you.(Ex. Christ, Jesus, Lord, Jesus Christ, peace, love, compassion)

② Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Let that word be gently present as the symbol of your sincere intention to be in the Lord's presence and open to His divine action within you.

* Unlike mindfulness meditation, the key to the Centering Prayer is intention, not attention.

The Method of the Centering Prayer

③ Whenever you become aware of any thoughts, simply return to your sacred word.

-The sacred word is used as an anchor to return to God's presence.

- The Holy Spirit works to purify the unconsciousness (passive).

(*The Holy Spirit: the energy from God, mindfulness)

④ Close your eyes and stay in silence for 2~3 minutes when the prayer is over.

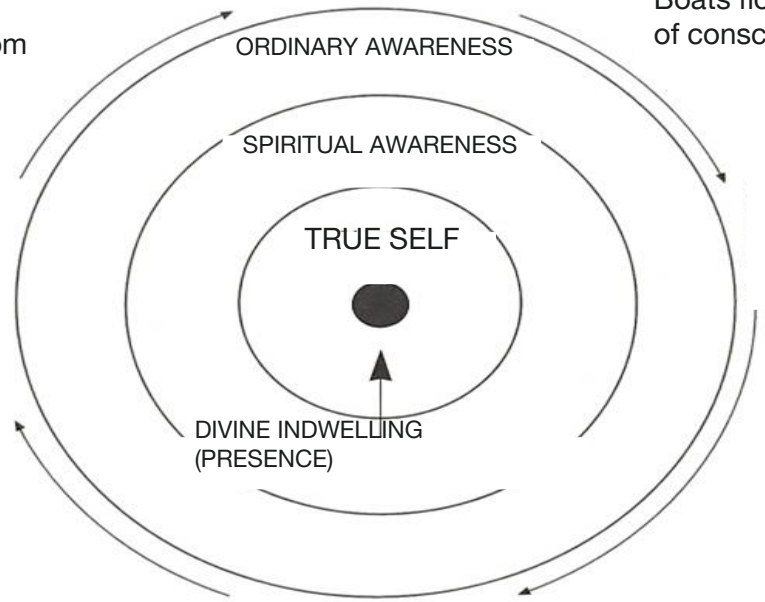
<Picture 5> Four moments of the Centering Prayer

(They represent the psychological experiences of many years of practice, yet, these cycles may be present in one prayer.”)

First Moment: SACRED WORD (Beginning the prayer)

Boats floating down the stream of consciousness)

Greater inner freedom



Fourth Moment: EVACUATION
(Primitive emotions and thoughts are released as one returns to the sacred symbol.)

Second Moment: REST
(Sense of God’s presence, peace, and interior silence.)

Third Moment: UNLOADING (As a result of the deep rest of body, mind, and spirit, defense mechanisms relax and the undigested material of early life emerges from the unconscious at times in the form of a bombardment of thoughts or primitive emotions.)

(3) Night of the Senses and Night of the Spirit

*Night of the Senses is a purgative process of purifying the sensory appetites hidden in the unconscious, such as the desire for survival/safety, attachment/respect, or power/control.**

- Night of the Spirit is the process in which the transformation of the soul continues following the Night of the Senses.
- The intellect, memory, and will are completely transformed, letting go of every aspect of the selfish ego.

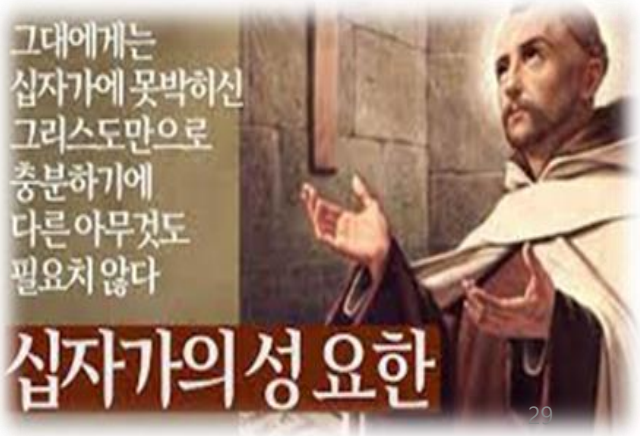
The final purgation during the Night of the Spirit is the action by the Holy Spirit in which all remnant of appetites or desires for sin is vanquished.

Night of the Senses and Night of the Spirit

Night of the Spirit frees us from the remnants of the false self and restores our True Self.

"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

St. John of the Cross likened (1542-1592) the contemplation to the fire that penetrates a log of wood.



Night of the Senses and Night of the Spirit

We are like a log of wood in fire, which exposes and uproots its unsightly desires until it is transformed into what it meant to be.

Todo = all
Nada= nothing

- Todo means God is everything, the origin of all beings.

- Nada means that which is not God is nothing.

Night of the Senses and Night of the Spirit

St. John of Cross emphasized how faith can lead to a union of the soul with God.

When we keep consenting/surrendering to God's presence, we are granted the light of faith.

Only when our minds are not disturbed by the passions, thus attaining the state of apatheia, one can enter the life of contemplation.

6) Contemplative prayer and the world

People became interested in contemplative prayer amid the spiritual deprivation in the aftermath of WWII.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), an American Trappist monk of the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani was the most influential figure in the Christian contemplative practice of the 20th century.

Merton had believed that contemplation belonged only to the enclosed monasteries until March 18, 1958, when he had an experience that united contemplation with the world while running errands in downtown Louisville.

Contemplative prayer and the world

- *"In the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs."*
- *" …we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness… To think that for sixteen or seventeen years I have been taking seriously this pure illusion that is implicit in so much of our monastic thinking…"*
- *"It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race. I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate…"*
- Merton had a sudden epiphany of the oneness with all people, which fundamentally changed his worldview..

Contemplative prayer and the world

When we realize and have true faith in “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:6),” our relationship with the world transforms.

Once we wake up to the mysteries of God who is in all and working through all, we can help but join and respond with responsibility.

The union with God cultivated through prayer completes with the action of love.

The deeper our spiritual practice becomes, the stronger our devotion to the world grows.

Conclusion

1. Christian prayer meets Buddhist meditation

Christian prayers have much in common with Mahayana Buddhism, whose final spiritual goal is to "benefit oneself and others."

The last of the Ten Ox-herding Pictures depicts an enlightened master now translating his wisdom into compassionate actions.

In Buddhism, it is not enlightenment unless it moves the practitioner to act to benefit others.

This is parallel to what Christian prayers aspire to, to respond and act in love.

- Master Wonhyo said, "Once truly enlightened and in nirvana, one cannot stay there (不住涅槃)."

"Because all living beings are sick, therefore I am sick. If all living beings are relieved of sickness, then my sickness will be mended." (*Vimalakirti Sutra, Chapter on Manjushri Inquiring About The Illness*)

2. While modern meditation focuses more on "benefiting oneself," efforts should be made to restore the balance with "benefiting others" through the practice of the Path of Bodhisattva.

– Communalized enlightenment

"The proof and authentication of all religions is the realization of a good heart, a human being's innate qualities of compassion and tolerance… which has today become an important work and activity of all religions."
- The 14th Dalai Lama

But each religion is tasked to develop its unique meditation techniques to suit modern society.

Christian churches must restore the tradition of simple prayer practice that has been passed down from the early Church fathers.

Like the Desert Fathers of the time of Constantine, modern Christians also must build a closed room in their mind.

"…when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Mattew 6:6)."

Catholic tradition has a firm principle of "reject(ing) nothing of what is true and holy in (other) religions."

"Just as "the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions," neither should these ways be rejected out of hand simply because they are not Christian. On the contrary, one can take from them what is useful so long as the Christian conception of prayer, its logic, and requirements are never obscured.."

– *Letters to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, October 15, 1989, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Christians hope that our meditation and prayer will grow deeper and richer through exchanges with Eastern spiritual traditions, as instructed by the Church. (body postures, breathing methods, etc.).

Thank you.